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Joe's Wine Co. to open a Minute Away from Former Trader Joe's Wine Shop on E. 14th St.

Joe's Wine Co. storefront on E. 13th St. looks eerily similar to the former Trader Joe's wine shop that abruptly shut down on E. 14th St. two years ago after workers there voted to unionize.

ARUNDHATI KUMAR | 13 AUG 2024 | 10:13



Signage is up for Joe's Wine Co. at 113 Third Ave. between 13th Street and 14th Street. (Photo by: E.V. Grieve)



Tags

ARUNDHATI KUMAR -
NEW LIQUOR STORE -

It's been two years since Trader Joe's closed its only licensed wine shop in New York State in the East Village in 2022. In early 2024, Joe's Wine Co. put up signage that said that they would be "opening soon" on 113 3rd Ave. just a block away from the former TJ Wine Store and the new store bears an uncanny resemblance to the former wine shop according to passersby.

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Wine Shop in New York City in the East Village in 2022. In early 2024, Joe's Wine Co. put up signage that said that they would be "opening soon" on 113 3rd Ave. just a block away from the former TJ Wine Store and the new store bears an uncanny resemblance to the former wine shop according to passersby.

A hairstylist from Brooklyn who was a frequent shopper at the Trader Joe's Wine Shop and preferred to remain anonymous thought that Joe's Wine Co. was part of Trader Joe's.

"I thought they were just splitting it up from previous location and moving it over here. I mean, it looks the same, really with the fonts and the colors, plus it was pretty inexpensive," he said.

Trader Joe's Wine Shop was a community staple on the outer edge of the East Village because it had been operational for 15 years before abruptly closing shop on Aug 11th, 2022, and they also had a long-standing reputation for being affordable. The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, which had organized the Trader Joe's wine store workers, said the shut down two years ago was a form of "union busting" and pressed a case before the National Labor Relations Board,

The NLRB issued a complaint against the mega-corporation on Jan 12th, 2024 which said that the store should be reopened, with employees compensated for lost wages.

"Let's make one thing clear: Trader Joe's shamelessly and illegally engaged in union busting to scare Trader Joe's workers across the region and stop these workers from having a voice on the job," said the UFCWIU. "We applaud the NLRB's decision to move forward with the ULP [Unfair Labor Practices] charge filed by crew members and look forward to holding Trader Joe's accountable for their egregious anti-worker behavior."

Since the store shut shop, Trader Joe's told its staff (in part) in an email, "It is now time for us to explore another location that will allow us to optimize the potential of our one and only license to sell wine in the state of New York. In addition, the space currently used for the wine shop will be used to improve the overall operations of store 540, our grocery store in Union Square."

The space eventually became home to Trader Joe's Pronto—a new concept store designed to offer quick, grab-and-go options. Located on 138 E. 14th St at Irving Place (steps away from the Trader Joe's at 142 E. 14th St.), it is the first of its kind for the chain.

Midst this, Joe's Wine Co. took up the retail space on 3rd Avenue, but it is an entirely different separate entity from Trader Joe's. State Liquor Authority paperwork from July 2023 lists the ownership as Taste Wine LLC, a business previously located at 50 Third Ave. between 10th Street and 11th Street (public records now list the name as Joe's Wine Inc.)

While some people from the neighborhood thought that the new liquor store would be a good addition to the community, others were Trader Joe's loyalists and skeptics. Antonia Gelamis, a 21-year-old college student from Colgate University told Straus News "I feel like I would probably be loyal to Trader Joe's as I'm a big Trader Joe's girl, so I'm not sure. I'm a little skeptical now that I see the stark resemblance between both

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Gelamis, a 21-year-old college student from Colgate University told Straus News "I feel like I would probably be loyal to Trader Joe's as I'm a big Trader Joe's girl, so I'm not sure. I'm a little skeptical now that I see the stark resemblance between both the shops." Of course, that will be a little difficult because Trader Joe's has made no move to reopen another wine store while it battles the NLRB over the latest ruling.

Gelamis said that she would probably have to think about whether she would buy from Joe's Liquor only after visiting the shop.

"I feel like I might just find a liquor store elsewhere. Or, I'd have to maybe see what they're offering here and then make a call," she said.

The hairstylist who preferred to remain anonymous said that there was a dearth of liquor shops in the area and the new addition would be convenient for people who drink alcohol.

"I mean, they do need something around here. There's nothing like a regular wine shop. You have to go all the way to Broadway? Like there's that big liquor store? Is it Broadway or Lafayette? One of those two? There's a really big wine store over there," he said.

Sheila Steinback, a retired journalism professor from New York University said that she "would shop from Trader Joe's Wine Shop just like everyone else."

"I used to go there for special gifts for holidays, it was a good place to grab something to keep whenever you're heading to a housewarming or something."

Talking about whether she thought that Joe's Liquor was trying to cash in on Trader Joe's brand name and reputation, Steinback says "Maybe they are doing it, maybe they aren't, but there's also Joe's pizza right across the street and it's totally unrelated to Trader Joe's right? It's just a common name."

Although Steinback feels that everyone who sees Joe's Liquor store will think it to be a part of Trader Joe's, they'd probably not change the name unless the mega corporation legally asks them to do so.

"I mean, nobody has a stranglehold of the name Joe, that's all I'm saying. Is it a coincidence? yes, it's a good coincidence for them, and if their prices reflect what everybody's expecting, they'll be great for the neighborhood I suspect."

Steinback adds that she won't be visiting Joe's Wine Shop regularly since she doesn't drink anymore except for social gatherings.

"I'm not the perfect customer for them and I certainly won't be making a beeline here," she said.

The shop will sell wine and spirits, and its Instagram account promises a "huge selection" of wines for \$12 and less. The store features a "Whiskey Wall," showcasing a curated selection of whiskeys. Additionally, they focus on offering a range of organic and natural wines.

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